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AUTHOR	Crepeau, Richard C.
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ABSTRACT

The history of sports is closely tied to the larger history of the society in which they are played. Baseball in the United States in the 1920's and 1930's assumed a major role in spreading the ideals of fair play, sportsmanship, and democracy to the Far East, with tours by amateur athletes and professionals such as Lou Gehrig and Babe Ruth. Even after the passage of the Immigration Act of 1924, it was felt that Baseball Diplomacy should continue in order to lessen Japanese resentment at American racial prejudice. The ideals of the early thirties, both in sports and diplomacy, were slowly dispelled by activities in the European sphere, where nations were preparing for war. The major baseball-related news from Japan, after successful tours in 1934, 1935, and 1936, came in 1940, when radio broadcasting of professional games ceased, and English playing terms and team names were replaced by Japanese words. In August of 1940, baseball was abolished in Japan, and on December seventh, Pearl Harbor was attacked. The sports world tried to explain the deed as a weakness in the Japanese national character, rather than as a failure of the civilizing role of baseball, and threw itself fully into the war effort. A period of idealism and naivete was coming to an end, and sports slowly came to recognize the fact, just as did the rest of society. (MB)

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Pearl Harbor: A Failure for Baseball?

by

Richard C. Crepeau
Department of History
Florida Technological University
Orlando, Florida

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Proclaiming itself as the National Pastime Baseball entered the decades of the 1920s and 1930s already having established a link with democracy as part of that claim. And if some saw the American mission in the world as the spreading of democracy, then surely the game of democracy should play an active role in carrying out that mission. Americans had historically assumed for themselves a special role in Asia. When American missionaries took Christianity and Democracy to the Orient, they had taken baseball with them. During the 1920s and 1930s many in baseball took the role as promoter of democracy quite seriously. As a result baseball took an active part in spreading American influence around the world during these decades of isolation.

The activities of baseball in Japan began almost immediately after World War I. In May of 1919 Adachi Kinnosuke reported that Japanese wrestlers were developing a passion for baseball. This led Kinnosuke to conclude that the Japanese had traveled "pretty far in the right direction, on the highway of civilization!"[1] In 1920 the University of Chicago baseball team toured Japan, and in 1921 a team from Japan toured U. S. campuses. One Japanese baseball enthusiast felt that baseball would be more important to peace between the United States and Japan than all the efforts of diplomats combined. The Literary Digest pointed out that even anti-American Japanese university students welcomed professional baseball players from the United States.[2] The following spring The Sporting News quoted a Japanese source on the power of baseball to promote friendship and understanding between the two nations.[3] A high water mark was reached following the 1922 season when a group of players made a tour of Japan,

China and the Philippines. Prior to the departure of the players President Harding sent a letter to Frank O'Neill of The New York Sun in which he gave his blessing to the tour. The President expressed the hope that "'the great American game may have real diplomatic value.'"[4] At the conclusion of the tour, the self-styled Bible of Baseball, The Sporting News, felt that the baseball missionaries had helped to bring about friendly feelings and better understanding between the United States and these nations. It reached a conclusion that was nearly axiomatic for the times. "It has been proven that most of human nature is akin, that we all are brothers under the skin and sons of the one Adam and that if left to our natural impulses without greed of exploiters and machinations of politicians to manufacture hatred we could and would live in peace and happiness."[5]

Following the same reasoning, H. G. Salsinger, in the Detroit News, noted that baseball was a cosmopolitan sport appealing to all nations and all races. Salsinger felt that the popularity of the game among the "'children of yellow races'" opened the possibility of a true World Series. Such a development would increase the prospects for world peace, since nations that had much in common were not prone to go to war with one another. Those with nothing in common "'generally manage to start one'"[6]

In 1924 Baseball Diplomacy was put in jeopardy when Congress passed the Immigration Act of 1924. Francis Richter, writing in The Sporting News, concluded that all of the advances made by baseball in China and Japan could be written off as being of little consequence. The declaration by the U. S. Government that these people were non-assimilable had destroyed all the good work in Asia. Richter favored a redirection of

effort to Latin America.[7] Irving Sanborn, writing in Baseball Magazine, looked at it from another perspective. He felt that baseball tours to Japan should continue because they would help to lessen Japanese resentment toward the immigration laws. They would demonstrate to the Japanese that not all Americans were racially prejudiced.[8]

The next major event between baseball and Japan was a tour led by Lou Gehrig following the 1931 major league season. The tour hit Tokyo on November 7 where it played before a sell-out crowd of some 65,000. Scalpers were getting $20 for a ticket. The first ball was thrown out by the Japanese Minister of Education, Tanaka, to the U. S. Ambassador, W. Cameron Forbes, who served as Tanaka's catcher. The team of All-Stars from the U. S. won the game easily, 7-0, from outclassed Rikkyo (St. Paul's) University.[9] On his return Lou Gehrig characterized Japanese baseball ability as good-field and no-hit. He praised the enthusiasm of the Japanese for baseball which "just about borders on the fanatical," and said that he had never seen anything like it even during the biggest years in Yankee Stadium.[10] The following spring the Rikkyo University team toured the United States. The tour was climaxed by a dinner in New York attended by Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig, as well as other players and baseball executives. National League President John Heydler took the occasion to express the hope that there would be a Japanese World Series winner in the near future.[11] In December of 1932 Lefty O'Doul returned from a three month coaching tour of Japan, claiming that Japanese baseball would soon be competitive with U. S. baseball.[12]

The greatest impact of any tour came in 1934 when Babe Ruth led a team of major league stars through the Orient. The Bambino was a legend

in Japan and sportswriter Fred Lieb correctly predicted that the Babe would receive one of the most impressive welcomes ever accorded to a foreign visitor. According to Lieb, the "Japanese urchins" knew of "Ruth and his mighty deeds. To these little almond-eyed fans he is some kind of demigod who dwells in a distant land, a man so strong that he can drive the ball over fences, houses and tree-tops whenever he comes to bat."[13] This tour turned out to be a grand success and to some it was more than a success just for baseball. Bill Dooley, of the Philadelphia Record, saw it promoting respect for America much more effectively than any politicians ever could.[14] The Sporting News shared Dooley's optimism calling it another important step in the attempt to establish universal peace. It served to demonstrate to both the American and the Oriental that underneath the skin they were both the same. The Sporting News looked forward to the day when a team from the Orient could come to the United States and compete on equal terms with the best of the U. S. players. This would "prove to the Americans that the so-called 'yellow peril' wears the same clothes, plays the same game and entertains the same thoughts. In other words that we are all brothers." Once this was accomplished the Japanese and the Americans could "sing together 'Take me out to the ball game.'"[15]

As to the tour itself Ruth and his all-stars got a big welcome from the fans of Japan as over 100,000 turned out to welcome the team to Tokyo. U. S. and Japanese flags were much in evidence in the crowd and the flags were waved together in greeting. "The Babe's big bulk today blotted out such unimportant things as international squabbles over oil and navies," reported the New York Times.[16] It is no wonder that the

team manager Connie Mack claimed that the trip was "'one of the greatest peace measures in the history of nations.'" Mack said that when the tour arrived in Japan there was a good deal of anti-American feeling in evidence over the resistance by the United States to parity in the naval treaty. Things didn't look good. "'And then Babe Ruth smacked a home run and all the ill feeling and underground war sentiment vanished just like that!'"[17]

A sour note was sounded as a post-script to the tour when Matsutaro Shoriki, a Tokyo publisher and the man who arranged the tour, was stabbed by a Japanese patriot. Katsuke Nagasaki, a member of the Warlike Gods Society, claimed that Shoriki was unpatriotic because the tour drained money from the depressed Japanese economy. Y. Hirai, a representative of Osaka Shosin Kaisha Steamship Line sent Babe Ruth a letter praising the tour as "'one of the best means of promoting the Japanese nation's understanding of true Yankee spirit . . .'" He said that he also hoped that the American people would not misunderstand the attempted assassination of the man who had promoted the tour.[18]

Despite these feelings, the winter baseball meetings of 1934 saw a move to discourage any future tours of this type. The Sporting News was appalled by the action, as were others. The journal expressed the opinion that baseball should be in the forefront of all movements designed to promote sportsmanship and brotherly love. It noted that there were some "jingoists" who were talking about strained relations between Japan and the United States. If such talk were true, the Ruth tour would have the effect of either delaying or preventing conflict. "We like to believe that countries having a common interest in a great sport would rather

fight it out on the diamond than on the battlefield."[19] This sort of idealism was certainly not unique to baseball and reflects the same atmosphere that produced the Kellogg-Briand Pact, the Nye Committee Report, the revisionist historians, and the peace movement of the 1930s.

Tours were also made by Harvard in 1934, Yale in 1935, and an amateur baseball team toured Japan in late 1935. In the spring of 1936 the Tokyo Giants came to the United States for part of spring training, and played two games in April against Tulsa. Following this visit by the Tokyo Giants very little is said of Japan in the baseball press for a few years. Attention is focused rather on Europe where nations that did not play baseball were headed into war.

The next major baseball story out of Japan came in 1940. Baseball in that country was undergoing significant changes, the full implications of which would not be revealed until December 7, 1941. Radio broadcasting of professional baseball in Japan was terminated. There was also an attempt to remove all American influences from the game. Such terms as "play ball," "strike," and "out" were being replaced by words in Japanese. In addition the uniforms of the players were to become more drab in color and carry Japanese lettering. The nicknames of the teams were being changed from such names as Senators, Tigers and Giants to Japanese names.[20]

It was not until the following August that the truly ominous news arrived from Japan. By decree of the "war lords," baseball was abolished in Japan. The Sporting News was dismayed by this development. It had seemed that baseball was developing into the national sport of Japan. The journal also noted that baseball had served to create goodwill between the United States and Japan. But philosophically Baseball's Bible recalled

that in the past, the "spirit of Mars" had been so powerful that it was able to turn brother against brother and father against son. It also seemed more than a coincidence that when dictators rose to power one of the first things they did was to eliminate competitive sports like baseball. These sports taught such values as initiative, teamwork, sportsmanship and fair play. This made them incompatible with dictatorship. The Sporting News, which now referred to the Emperor of Japan as "Mr. Herohater," closed their comment on the abolition of baseball in Japan with a quote from John Galsworthy:

> "Sport, which still keeps the flag of idealism flying, is perhaps the saving grace of the world at present, with its spirit of rules observed, and high regard for the adversary, whether the fight is going for or against. When, if ever, the spirit of sport, which is the spirit of fair play, reigns over international affairs, the cat force, which rules there now, will slink away and human life will emerge for the first time from the jungle."[21]

As the 1941 major league baseball season came to a close, baseball was ready for the eventuality of war, with Europe still foremost in mind. September, October, and November would see more players inducted into military service and occasional charges that baseball players were seeking to avoid the draft. The charges were duly refuted by the sportswriters. Then came December 7th.

"Uncle Sam, we are at your command!" proclaimed The Sporting News, as it pledged baseball to full cooperation and dedication to the war. The game would even close down, if that became necessary. "Born in America, propagated in America and recognized as the National Game, baseball and all those engaged in the sport are Americans first, last and always." Previous generations had set aside bat, ball and glove to serve their country. "None will be found lacking today, for in all the history of

baseball there never was a conscientious objector, or a slacker in its ranks."[22]

At the winter meetings of Organized Baseball the official reactions were presented to the public. National League President, Ford Frick, wired the President of the United States that the National League pledged its "complete cooperation in this time of national crisis."[23] The major leagues authorized $25,000 to purchase baseball equipment for the Army and Navy sports programs. This money would come from receipts of the 1942 All-Star game.[24]

Individual players were also cited as examples to the nation. Bob Feller, the American ideal from Van Meter, Iowa, volunteered for the Naval Reserve. Feller was quoted as saying, "'There are many things more important than baseball these days . . . . First we'll have to win the war to keep baseball.'"[25] In a cartoon by Reinert in the Cleveland Plain Dealer, Feller was depicted alongside Uncle Sam, both with fists clenched and backed by big guns from a ship. Feller's uniform was hung on a hook and his glove was laying next to the uniform. The caption read, "Now Pitching for Uncle Sam."[26] A few weeks later the front page of the sports section of the Detroit News carried a photograph of Babe Ruth holding $100,000 worth of Defense Bonds. The caption read, "Babe Invests Fruits of the Home Run."[27]

Then there was the case of Hank Greenberg. The former Tiger star was a sergeant in the Army. He had been one of the first of the big stars drafted. However, two days before Pearl Harbor Greenberg had been discharged from the Army under the terms of a regulation discharging draftees over the age of twenty-eight. Now in the wake of Pearl Harbor Hank

Greenberg made a decision to return immediately to active Army service. He became the first ballplayer to join up, earning him the distinction that belonged to Hank Gowdy of the Braves in World War I. For his action the New York World Telegram named Greenberg their "Star of the Week." In The Sporting News, J. G. Taylor Spink wrote a page one feature story on Hank Greenberg. Spink pointed out that Greenberg could have gone home and left the battle to younger men. But Greenberg was driven on by a picture of his parents who had emigrated from Rumania. They had not agreed with the way of life in Rumania, and in the United States the Greenbergs prospered. Their son had an equal opportunity with others and reached a high position in his profession. "'We are in trouble,' said Hank, 'and there is only one thing for me to do--return to the service.'" By this decision, wrote Spink, "Hank Greenberg gave the game and the nation a special thrill."[28]

As to the role of baseball during the war there seemed to be some consensus. Baseball should go with business as usual, serving as an escape and morale builder for a nation at war. Naturally many of the players would be drafted. That was as it should be. One of the Cleveland writers lamented the fact that Cleveland's chances of defeating the Yankees had been diminished with the departure of the likes of Feller, but this wasn't quite so important because "there are some other people at large who need beating worse than they do."[29] It was also the general feeling among the sportswriters that a nation devoted to sports in general and baseball in particular would be well prepared for war. Gene Mack conveyed this message in a cartoon titled "The Come-Back Spirit." In the cartoon Uncle Sam had a black-eye labeled "Pearl Harbor" and a tear in

the shoulder of his coat labeled "Manila." Around Uncle Sam were four drawings depicting four different sports. For baseball there was a drawing depicting the fourth game of the 1929 World Series in which the Philadelphia A's were trailing the Chicago Cubs 7-0. The A's scored ten runs in the 8th inning and won the game.[30] Joe Williams, in the New York World Telegram stressed the importance of toughness in war and the role of sport in producing toughness in the society. There were few dissenters from these viewpoints. One was Stanley Woodward of the New York Herald-Tribune who wrote that he had never accepted the "playing-fields-of-Eaton" idea. "We doubt that a man can be better fitted for war by participating in sports than by sitting in a room brooding over his thwarted ambitions and his injustices." Woodward also rejected the notion that sports were an essential industry, and wrote the heresy that it simply didn't matter if baseball did not open in the spring.[32]

The fact that the attack on the United States came from Japan was especially galling to many connected with the National Pastime. Baseball had made a greater impact on Japan than any other country outside the United States. Was it possible that a people who took so well to the game of democracy could now turn out to be the archenemy of the greatest democracy on earth? This turn of events called for an urgent rewriting of history. The Sporting News proved equal to the task. It traced the history of baseball in Japan back to its introduction by American missionaries just after the U. S. Civil War. The Japanese quickly became first-class fielders, but due to their small size they were never able to develop into powerful hitters. This weakness "always was a sore spot with this cocky race." They could not match the power of visiting

American teams. The cockiness was a cover for a "national inferiority complex." Furthermore, the Japanese never really fully converted to the game. The people of this "treacherous Asiatic land" were unable to understand how Americans could question the authority of the umpire and harass their opponents. Americans would never say "'So sorry' between a grimacing yellow mask," nor would Americans ever "stab an 'honorable opponent' in the back," or "crush out his brains with a bat while he is asleep . . . ." It was obvious to the careful observer, that the Japanese, although they had acquired some skill at the game, had never acquired the "soul of our National Game . . . . if the spirit of the game ever had penetrated their yellow hides," they never could have committed that "infamous deed" of December 7, 1941.[33]

The Detroit News also addressed themselves to this question as they considered the whole issue of goodwill sports tours in light of Pearl Harbor. The Detroit paper felt that it would be pointless to condemn the international promotion of sport. The masses had wanted such promotion and the masses usually get what they want. Some idealists had said and believed that sports might replace war. The masses liked to read this kind of optimism and they wished they could believe it. Only a few were actually deluded by it. Sport need have no regrets. It had all been done in good faith. In conclusion the paper issued a warning: "But this should not be forgotten: The masses don't make war--not unless they're hit, as America was hit at Pearl Harbor."[34]

The baseball world was angry indeed. Umpire Bill Klem who had made several tours of Japan was asked for his reaction. He shouted across a hotel lobby, "'the Jap is a constitutional kleptomaniac.'"[35] Joe Williams

noted that you can't beat savagery with humanism. "The little brown brothers, eh? The little brown b----s! And nobody's going to call us Uncle Sap any more, either."[36] James Doyle quoted fictional character Crasher Gates as saying that the "Rising Sons of--er--Nippon" didn't learn their "hit-and-run maneuver" from their contact with baseball. The error of the Year was awarded to the "Jap who, when asked if he'd have chocolate, replied, 'No, I'll take Manila.'"[37] Frankie Frisch was reported as saying that if he lost any of his Pittsburgh Pirates to the draft he hoped his boys would hit ".400 against the Japs and Nazis alike."[38]

Dan Daniel's character, Snorter Casey, also expressed disappointment over the failure of baseball to have the proper influence on the Japanese. Casey concluded that the Japanese were merely going through the motions and did not know any more about baseball than did Hitler. To Casey "the dirty Japs" were "white-livered punks," "thugs," "crooks," "skunks," and "a lot of cockeyed Joe Yoshiaras." He warned that they would never beat the U.S.A. at war, baseball or marbles, and that someday in the near future they were going to wake up to find they had slipped themselves a "Micky Finn" when they attacked Pearl Harbor. "Mr. Tojo will wake up some night with the feeling he got into this thing with two strikes against him and Feller having one hell of a day. Nuts to the Nippons."[39]

With the coming of the New Year, J. G. Taylor Spink offered New Years' resolutions for the fans and for the major leagues. For the fans, it was resolved that they dedicate their full time and energies to defeating the Nazis and the Japs and make the world free of any "impediments to the ways of living which are inherent in America, and in Democracy." Also that the fans work to strengthen the "bonds of union" of all the

American people. The fans should do their best to help keep baseball alive, working as a force for national good and the maintenance of national morale. For the major leagues, it was resolved that the gift of baseball given to Japan be withdrawn and that more care be taken in the future when determining who should be given the gift. Furthermore, the major leagues should confess the error they made by allowing the Japanese to "share the benefits and the God-given qualities of the great game with us." The attention of all "civilized, democratic peoples of the world" should be called to the "unworthiness" of the Japanese to retain baseball. The revocation should be made effective as of December 7, 1941, when "the Jap agents of Hell treacherously attacked Pearl Harbor."[40]

And so baseball for the second time in the Twentieth Century faced a war of major proportions. It tried to blame the attack at Pearl Harbor on a weakness of the Japanese character rather than as a failure for baseball. Of course it was neither. But the point is that an era was clearly closing. The extravagance of claim and the gross naivete purveyed by the shills of baseball would have to be toned down. Idealism in all forms had rough sledding ahead. The world of cynical three-year-olds was coming, and sportswriters would have to "tell-it-like-it-is."

FOOTNOTES

[1]Adachi Kinnosuke, "Attaboy Japan," Everybody's, 40(May, 1919), p. 68.

[2]"Japanese Baseball Invasion is on the Way," Literary Digest, 69(May, 7, 1921), pp. 48-51.

[3]"For Peace and Good Will," The Sporting News, March 23, 1922, p. 4.

[4]New York Times, October 6, 1922, p. 18.

[5]"Brotherhood and Baseball," The Sporting News, January 25, 1923, p. 4.

[6]"Scribbled by Scribes," The Sporting News, March 8, 1923, p. 4.

[7]Francis C. Richter, "Casual Comment," The Sporting News, August 14, 1923, p. 4.

[8]"Baseball Crusaders and the Sporting Spirit," Literary Digest, 84(February 14, 1925), pp. 66-69.

[9]New York Times, November 8, 1931, Section X, p. 1.

[10]New York Times, December 23, 1931, p. 24.

[11]New York Times, May 12, 1932, p. 25.

[12]New York Times, December 22, 1932, p. 23.

[13]Fred Lieb, "All Japan Ready to Hail Ruth and His Team of Stars," The Sporting News, October 18, 1934, p. 3.

[14]"Scribbled by Scribes," The Sporting News, January 24, 1935, p. 4.

[15]"Good Will Tour of Orient," The Sporting News, November 1, 1934, p. 4.

[16]New York Times, November 3, 1934, p. 9.

[17]New York Times, January 6, 1935, Section III, p. 7.

[18]New York Times, February 22, 1935, p. 1 and February 24, 1935, p. 25.

[19]"Stifling Good Will Tours," The Sporting News, January 3, 1935, p. 4.

[20]"Brief Bits of Gossip," The Sporting News, November 7, 1940, p. 10.

[21]"Sport Falls as Dictators Rise," The Sporting News, August 28, 1941, p. 4.

[22]"Uncle Sam, We Are At Your Command," The Sporting News, December 11, 1941, p. 4.

[23]J. Roy Stockton, "Browns Will Stay in St. Louis," St. Louis Post-Dispatch, December 9, 1941, p. 2B.

[24]Edgar G. Brands, "Majors Gird to Carry on During U. S. Emergency," The Sporting News, December 18, 1941, p. 1.

[25]"Feller is Signed by the Naval Reserve," New York Times, December 11, 1941, p. 40.

[26]Cleveland Plain Dealer, December 10, 1941, p. 23.

[27]Detroit News, December 21, 1941, p. 1 (Sports).

[28]J. G. Taylor Spink, "Hank Greenberg Back to Colors . . ." The Sporting News, December 18, 1941, p. 1 and New York World Telegram, December 13, 1941, p. 24.

[29]Gordon Cobbledick, "Plain Dealing," Cleveland Plain Dealer, December 10, 1941, p. 24.

[30]Boston Daily Globe, December 9, 1941, p. 23.

[31]"By Joe Williams," New York World Telegram, December 10, 1941, p. 43.

[32]Stanley Woodward, "Sports Here and There," New York Herald-Tribune, December 9 and 10, 1941, p. 36.

[33]"It's Not The Same Game in Japan," The Sporting News, December 18, 1941, p. 4.

[34]"What the Masses Want They Get . . ." Detroit News, December 18, 1941, p. 55.

[35]Dan Daniel, "Daniel's Dope," New York World Telegram, December 13, 1941, p. 16.

[36]"By Joe Williams," New York World Telegram, December 10, 1941, p. 43.

[37]James E. Doyle, "The Sports Trail," Cleveland Plain Dealer, December 13, 1941, p. 18.

[38]New York Times, January 3, 1942, p. 13.

[39]Daniel M. Daniel, "Rambling Round the Circuit With Pitcher Snorter Casey," The Sporting News, December 25, 1941, p. 4.

[40]J. G. T. Spink, "Looping the Loops," The Sporting News, January 1, 1942, p. 1.